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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IT](#) [ITALIAN](#) [POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY MAINTAINS STRONG SUPPORT FOR TURKEY'S EU
ACCESSION TALKS

REF: A. ROME 01979

[1](#)B. ROME 02372

[1](#)C. ROME 02422

[1](#)D. ROME 02178

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Candace Putnam, for
reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. Prime Minister Berlusconi's government continues to steadfastly support Turkey in the run-up to the expected start of EU negotiations October 3, although Italian officials acknowledge that the talks will be lengthy and difficult. Italian officials concede that EU membership for Turkey has become a tougher sell as the EU works to overcome internal difficulties, but they maintain that it is important to solidify democracy there and protect Europe's flank from the spread of Islamic extremism. Italy's center-left opposition, however, is unlikely to champion Turkey's cause if elected in next year's election. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Over the past several months, Italian officials have told Poloffs and visiting USG officials that the double "no" from France and the Netherlands on the EU constitution has made it harder to stir up enthusiasm for EU expansion. They acknowledge that the EU is under pressure to bounce back from the constitutional setback and redefine the Union's future, but they maintain that relaunching the process of EU integration and expansion could shake the Union out of its doldrums. Senior MFA officials suggested months ago that France would use its "no" vote to slow or block negotiations with Ankara but that Italy would work to prevent a few big states from "calling the shots" on the future of the Union (ref A).

[1](#)3. (C) MFA Secretary General Vatani told visiting A/S Fried in June that Italy will firmly support Turkey's bid in the run-up to the start of EU negotiations in October (ref A). Italian officials argue that an EU "no" to Turkey could have negative implications on accession talks for Bulgaria and Romania, which the Italians want to avoid. (Note: EU membership for the Balkans is a key Italian foreign policy goal. End note.) In July 2005, MFA EU Office Director Luigi Mattiolo told Laborcouns that in-depth EU discussions on the way forward with Turkey are not likely until the September Gymnich or perhaps delayed until November (after the German elections) when the EU could hold an "extraordinary" European Council meeting (ref B).

[1](#)4. (SBU) FM Fini's visit to Ankara in July was designed to publicly reiterate Italy's support for Turkey ahead of the expected start of formal negotiations. During his visit, Fini noted that Turkey remains a strategic partner for the EU and that membership for Turkey serves the Union's interests. Fini said that Turkey, as a member of NATO, already is integrated with Europe and the United States militarily and politically. (During an earlier meeting in Rome with German FM Fischer, Fini said that embracing Turkey also helps fight terrorism and the spread of Islamic extremism.) At the same time, he signaled that EU negotiations will likely be long and complex--lasting at least 10 years, he speculated--and will include "timely verifications" and "moments for pause" to ensure that Ankara complies with EU values before formal integration. Berlusconi in June agreed that negotiations could be lengthy, in part, he says, because it will take time to convince French and Germany publics on the benefits of having a democratic Muslim country in the EU.

[1](#)5. (SBU) In contrast to the government's enthusiasm, center-left leader (and former EC President) Romano Prodi has suggested that the EU should delay enlargement discussions to take stock of the Union's future (ref D). In a June interview with a regional newspaper, Prodi implied that intra-EU problems fueling grumblings about the Euro and the rejection of the draft EU constitution, are linked to worries over further expansion. Prodi explicitly stated that the "real" concern was not the Euro, but Turkey. He suggested the EU "rethink" Turkey's future membership because, in his view, the "conditions" for Turkey's accession in the near and medium terms no longer exist. (Comment: Prodi has been consistently lukewarm about Turkey's potential EU membership but shares the government's goal of pursuing EU membership

for Balkan countries. End comment.)

16. (SBU) Comment: Berlusconi's government remains consistently "on message" regarding Turkish EU accession and may already be working behind-the-scenes to build support for launching accession negotiations in October. However, if Prodi's coalition wins next year's parliamentary election, Ankara is unlikely to find an enthusiastic champion in Rome.

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